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**2-1-1 VIRGINIA new telephone number to provide free
and easy access to health and human services**

RICHMOND – Today with the support of Governor Timothy M. Kaine, the United Way of Greater Richmond & Petersburg, the Virginia Alliance of Information & Referral Systems and the Virginia Department of Social Services, 2-1-1 officially launched in Virginia.

2-1-1 is an easy to remember phone number connecting people with information on available community services. 2-1-1 VIRGINIA will provide free and easy access to health and human services, such as: child care resource and referral centers, energy assistance, financial assistance, senior services and volunteer opportunities.

“Sometimes, you just don’t know who to call for help. 2-1-1 will allow us to make health and human services more accessible to Virginians by providing local referrals to those who need assistance,” said Governor Kaine. “There are thousands of health and human service agencies offering assistance throughout the state, some have separate hotlines and others have several referral numbers to call. Navigating the multitude of available options can be overwhelming.”

“2-1-1 is a valuable resource for all Virginians. Dialing this three digit telephone number will allow families and individuals to quickly access referrals to local departments of social services, community action agencies and additional organizations,” said Anthony Conyers, Jr., Commissioner, Virginia Department of Social Services.

In addition to providing local health and human service referrals, 2-1-1 VIRGINIA will connect individuals or groups interested in volunteering or donating items with the organizations most in need of their help.

During disasters, 2-1-1 VIRGINIA will play an important role in disaster recovery efforts, mobilizing volunteers, and assisting those searching for temporary housing, food, clothing and other basic needs.

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“All calls are confidential and local trained professionals will search their databases and make service referrals using the caller’s zip code,” said Joan Phelps, President, Virginia Alliance for Information & Referral Systems. “Our goal is awareness. Our hope is that 2-1-1 VIRGINIA will become as familiar as 911 is for emergencies and 411 for directory assistance.”

About 2-1-1 VIRGINIA

Coordinated through the Virginia Department of Social Services, in partnership with the Virginia Alliance for Information & Referral Systems (VAIRS), 2-1-1 is an easy to remember, free telephone number connecting people with information on available community services. Dialing 2-1-1 connects you to a trained professional, who can listen to your situation and suggest resources using one of largest databases for health and human services information in Virginia. 2-1-1 VIRGINIA providers include: Council of Community Services (Roanoke), Family Resource & Referral Center (Staunton), The Planning Council (Norfolk), United Way of Central Virginia (Lynchburg), United Way of Greater Richmond & Petersburg (Richmond).

About the National 2-1-1 Initiative

In July 2000, the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) designed 2-1-1 exclusively to provide public access to information and referral for health and human services.

Approximately 46 percent of the U.S. population has access to 2-1-1.

A bill in Congress, authored by U.S. Senators Elizabeth Dole (R-NC) and Hillary Clinton (D-NY) would provide \$150 million in matching grants nationally in support of 2-1-1 services. Co-sponsors include senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer and Rep. George Radanovich.

The University of Texas performed a cost benefit analysis and estimated that the net value to society of a national 2-1-1 system was \$130 million in the first year alone and a conservative estimate of \$1.1 billion over 10 years.

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